

IAN ALLAN

BUSES

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EASTERN PROMISE Capital Citybus in East London
SHEARINGS A new incarnation
NORTH DEVON — in South Devon

Capital Citybus

Capital Citybus is the nineties name of a child of the eighties. Only eight years old, it is nearly as big as some of the London Buses subsidiaries with which it competes for tendered services and it has big ambitions.

ALAN MILLAR tells its story

Capital origins

Capital Citybus began as London Pride Sightseeing, founded by current managing director Leon Daniels and backed by Ensign Bus chairman Peter Newman. Leon Daniels helped run Obsolete Fleet's restored buses on London tourist services in the 1970s. By the early 1980s Ensign made its fortune selling ex-London Transport DMS-type Daimler Fleetlines at home and abroad.

As well as being a DMS customer, London Pride was a product of coach deregulation which opened up the London sightseeing market to new operators. It ran covered and open-top tours and struck gold by identifying the Trocadero, off Piccadilly Circus, as its main pick-up point. It bought the rival Ebdon Coaches round-London tours in 1987, but resisted all temptations to go up market. 'We dug our heels in and unashamedly sold a Southend seafront-type service in central London with old open-top buses,' says Daniels.

'We unashamedly sold a Southend seafront-type service in central London'

Capital Citybus 108 (JHE 173W) is an ex-South Yorkshire Metrobus, seen at Walthamstow in the current livery.
R. J. WATERHOUSE



'We were trying to provide a professional service on LT contracts with a dog's dinner of old buses'

Daniels jokes that his first G-registered bus had the G at the wrong end of the number plate, but it was no joke, especially on route 252. 'We were trying to provide a professional service on LT contracts with a dog's dinner of old buses,' he recalls.

To cut maintenance costs and attract better staff, he needed new buses, even non-standard ones. One day in 1989, he bought eight lowheight Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympians — with Cummins engines and ZF gearboxes — from Arlington's dealer stock at Enfield and also bought four Northern Counties-bodied Olympians, a 9.5 metre and three 10.5 metre buses. The long Olympians went to London Pride, which was introducing multi-lingual commentaries, to attract a wider market as English-speaking tourist numbers declined, and ex-National Express Metroliners.

Time to sell

New buses were not followed by new LT contracts. Ensign bid unsuccessfully for 30 contracts as competitor pushed down tender prices and London Buses' subsidiaries became more efficient. It bid over a wider area, cut its profit expectations and tightened up costs, but by Christmas 1989, it was time to sell Ensign Bus Services.

Stevensons of Uttoxeter and Western Travel showed interest and Hong Kong Citybus offered to buy, but for less than the asking price. Then an American company, Whitehall Investments Inc of Delaware, Ohio, agreed in July 1990 to pay £6million for the company, but the deal was never completed. The only visible relic of this sorry tale was an Olympian which ran briefly with a London Suburban Buses fleetname. The Ensign name was not to be sold to Whitehall and the Olympian was prepared for the press launch which never happened.

The Whitehall debacle cost Ensign valuable time. The contracts were nine months older and less valuable to prospective buyers and the recession had further undermined the rest of the business. Talks were re-opened with Hong Kong Citybus and on 28 December 1990, it bought the bus services, 87 buses, the

Dagenham base to which it had moved during the year and two years' use of the Ensign name.

Citybus is itself young, set up in 1982 by former China Motor Bus traffic manager Lyndon Rees. It was part-owned for a time by the BET group's United Transport, but is now part of the CNT Group of hotel, telecommunications and paint interests owned by Chinese businessman TT Tsui (pronounced 'Choy').

The new owner also acquired Frontrunner Buses (South East), to which the buses were transferred, but it traded as Ensign Citybus with a new Chinese logo. London Pride remained with Ensign. Daniels, kept busy setting up a new management structure, was at last able to take delivery of 24 Northern Counties-bodied Dennis Dominators stored at Wigan pending Ensign's sale. But there was still no reward from LT. Indeed, routes 62 and 145 were won back by London Buses.

It toyed with buying other businesses instead and looked seriously at Sovereign Bus & Coach which was up for sale by the AJS Group. Its mix of LT contracts in Harrow and services in urban Hertfordshire appealed, but AJS wanted more than CNT was prepared to pay.

An ill wind . . .

Then London Buses suddenly shot itself in the foot. London Forest had won all of the Walthamstow area tenders, but its bid hung on selling a controversial pay and conditions package to its entire workforce. Short strikes escalated into an indefinite stoppage and London Forest lost the contracts. Its managing director resigned soon after and the company was broken up.

During the strike, Ensign operated one LT contract temporarily — the D1 Docklands-Waterloo Express — and when the contracts were re-awarded, it picked up the 97/97^A, 123, 158, 212 and 215. It also made a successful package bid for four Wood Green midibus routes, the 153, 298 (ex-Grey-Green), 299 and W6. LT pressed Ensign to start running some of the services from September 1991, so the business doubled in size at incredibly short notice.

Just to keep it on its toes, Ensign won four more contracts: the D4 and 236 midibus routes, the D6 and W10. The last of these, the D6, started on 9 May, by which time it

had also won the contract for double-deck route 257 from October. It took over the contract for Mobility Bus services in Waltham Forest and Newham in June, using LT Leyland Nationals. The company also operates six commercial routes, mainly in the Romford area, and Hertfordshire service 321, Rickmansworth-Luton, on Sundays.

A second depot was bought, a freehold site on redundant industrial premises at Northumberland Park, next to the Victoria Line Underground depot, and the operations from there are run by a separate company, Walthamstow Citybus. This move also accelerated a change of identity. The smart blue and silver Ensign colours wore badly. Blue is also an unlucky colour to some Chinese. Yellow (used in Hong Kong) and silver was tried, but still tarnished, and other experiments led to the choice of all-over yellow (a different shade from the Hong Kong fleet) and red vinyl stripes. It wears better, is cheaper and quicker to apply and stands out in busy traffic. At the same time, the Capital Citybus name was adopted, first for the Walthamstow depot, and is being applied gradually at Dagenham.

Growth also meant a buying spree, cleaning out stocks of unsold buses at two of the north of England's troubled factories as the fleet grew to 160 in time for the new contracts to start. From Volvo's Workington plant, it took 24 complete Olympians, 12 already built, 12 in production; and from Northern Counties it took six Olympians in stock since 1990 and two Dominators which were being built as demonstrators. One of the Workington Olympians was the two-door East London vehicle built for the UITP exhibition in Stockholm in 1991. The others were all one-door buses, marking a change in policy since the company changed hands. Daniels says single door buses are safer and cheaper. Two-door buses are more expensive to buy and, because they are less popular generally, they have a lower resale value. They cost £100 a month more to lease.

The 24 1990 Dominators comply with the 1993 regulations on exit door safety, but rather than modify other two-door buses — including the Metrobus 2s — Capital Citybus will spend slightly more converting them to one-door as they go through their annual tests.

Capital Citybus has bought the last Metrobus 2 built for West Midlands Travel, but never delivered. Optare bought it for early Spectra development work, but it had only clocked up 2,500 miles when it was sold.
ALAN MILLAR

Above right:

One of few buses painted yellow and silver is former RM429 which is used for promotional work. It is parked at Dagenham alongside a Scania K93 bought from Keitelwell's.
ALAN MILLAR

Right:

One of the 24 two-door Dominators already repainted in the yellow livery.
ALAN MILLAR

BUSES



The relationship with Ensign — 'very, very, very close' from the start, according to Leon Daniels — came closer in the autumn of 1985 when it bought Culturebus from the receivers of Trathens, the Plymouth-based coach group which had collapsed with the shuttle coach slump. Culturebus had been started by a Cityrama-backed company in 1983, launching London's first hop-on/hop-off sightseeing services with DMSs. The service flopped, but not for the want of trying.

London Pride increased the number of stops from 20 to 37, offered intermediate fares and inter-availability with its tours and Leon Daniels toured the world selling it to the travel trade. 'It was the easiest concept to sell,' he recalls. 'Everybody loved it, but nobody used it.' Up against LT's Travelcard, one ticket for a half-hourly 37-stop route that stopped at 18.00hrs seemed unattractive. Culturebus was sold to Southend Transport, which tagged it on to its X1 commuter service from the spring of 1987 until the end of that season when the venture finally died.

Ensign and London Pride were merged at the end of 1985 and the group was restructured into three subsidiary companies: bus and coach sales (by then selling new Berkhof coaches), bus engineering and bus operations. London Pride was renamed Ensign Bus Services and, in addition to Culturebus, ran a free bus service for Ford at Dagenham, rail emergency services and two important contracts with Southend Transport — the weekend 795 Brighton service and operation of a staging post for the X1 commuter service at its Purfleet headquarters. But it was hungry for growth.

London services

Ensign wanted to bid for LT route tenders which could be run from Purfleet, effectively confining it to the chunk of inner Essex between the M11 and M25. It lost out to Eastern National in the first tendering round when it bid to run the 193 Romford-Hornchurch service, but in the second round won the 145 Dagenham-Redbridge contract which it started running on 21 June 1986.

By then, it had also started two commuter services into London, the 601 from Ockendon and 603 from Harold Hill, which started in January and February 1986. A planned 602 route from Corbets Tey never started. These used London Pride and Culturebus vehicles on positioning journeys, but the marriage was troubled.

Above right:
Although Ensign was primarily a double-deck operator it did have a few Leyland Nationals for a time, including ex-Portsmouth 504 (KCR 111P), seen on the 145, Ensign's first London contract.
T. K. BROOKES

Right:
Capital Citybus has invested heavily in new buses over the last year or so. 132 (J132 YRM) is a recent Northern Counties-bodied Leyland Olympian, seen at Hornchurch.
R. J. WATERHOUSE

Congestion meant buses were not always available to run the first tours and evening tours were upset by the need to marshal commuter buses. And covered-top commuter buses went down as badly on hot summer sightseeing tours as open-toppers did with commuters. The commuter routes ended when Culturebus was sold.

Successful operation of the 145 was followed from January 1987 by route 62, the Barking-Gants Hill service upon which LT's last RTs had run in 1979. This created a home for more DMSs, some of which — the last 50 Ensign bought from LT — had been earmarked for an aborted sale to Saudi Arabia and which had to be re-roofed hurriedly for the 62.

Daniels wishes now he had ordered 25 Metrobuses; 'we mourn the passing of MCW'

Two tenders for four routes were won in 1988: the 165/365 and 246/446. For the first time, LT demanded new buses and, in any case, Ensign wanted to modernise the fleet which at one point included 35 1975-built DMSs. The DMSs had either come with Gardner engines or acquired them later, so it wanted them on its new buses, too. It

plumped for the MCW Metrobus 2. The LT contract called for five, but Ensign ordered nine and increased that to 16 before delivery at the end of 1988. Given MCW's demise only months later, Daniels wishes now he had ordered 25. 'They are superb and we mourn the passing of MCW. They remain extremely reliable and dependable buses.'

They were joined by five ex-South Yorkshire Mark 1 Metrobuses from the dealer's stock, the last of 50. They had lingered at Purfleet as they had Rolls-Royce engines, but what was lost in standardisation was gained in the purchase price.

Further growth came in mid-1989 after Ensign guessed correctly that Stagecoach, having bought East Midland, might want to sell Frontrunner Buses (South East), which ran its LT and Essex County Council contracts. It passed the Essex routes on to County Bus & Coach and added three more LT tenders to its portfolio: the 248, 252 and 550. Frontrunner Buses (South East) then became a dormant Ensign company.

Ensign swapped East Midland's ex-Greater Manchester Atlanteans for some of Ribble's two-door ex-Plymouth Atlanteans. They were supplemented by a fascinating mixture of ageing buses from the dealer's stock and by some newer used Metrobuses.



Also bought were 14 one-door Rolls-Royce-powered Mk1 Metrobuses from South Yorkshire and five Metrobus 2s, the G-registered bus used by Optare and DAF for Spectra development, and four of the E-registered Harrow Buses vehicles returned on lease to Plaxton early last year. Four lowheight Alexander-bodied Olympians have come from Highland Bus & Coach, three 1986 models, one from 1984; three have coach seats and are split between the two depots to generate private hires. In case it buys London Buses Titans when they are withdrawn later this year, an ex-Greater Manchester Titan has been bought from Wright's of Wrexham and, to start replacing double-deckers run under a low bridge near Cranham, it has bought three Scania single-deckers from Kettlewell's of Retford, 1986 and 1987 K92s with East Lancs bodies and a 1987 Plaxton-bodied K93. Leyland National Greenways may be bought in future.

Minibuses . . .

The choice of midibuses was influenced by Sovereign's choice of Reeve Burgess-bodied Mercedes-Benz 811s on its Harrow services. Twenty were bought for the Wood Green routes, like Sovereign on contract maintenance agreements. The 811 now costs £3,500 more, so 10 Optare Metroriders were bought for the 236, also on contract maintenance, and three more 1991-spec 811s were bodied by Alexander for the D4. Metroriders are more likely to be bought in future, but Leon Daniels is keen to operate Dennis Darts if awarded a suitable contract.

Capital could import buses from Hong Kong

He needs more secondhand double-deckers for the 257, but confesses he has no idea what to buy, such is the scarcity of good used vehicles. Fortunately, Capital Citybus is sufficiently decentralised to accommodate non-standard buses and it could import buses from Hong Kong.

. . . and big Olympians

Leon Daniels regrets that LT did not share his enthusiasm for another Hong Kong feature. Capital Citybus tendered to run the high-profile route 29 from Victoria to Wood Green with three-axle Olympian semi-coaches with air conditioning, a feature he says would have improved the atmosphere in the buses on wet days and might have generated traffic. They would have had 95-100 seats and an all-standing area between the two doors. He blames traditionalists at LT, but argues that they the buses could have been shipped to Hong Kong in the event of failure.

All is not lost, however. A Hong Kong air-conditioned Olympian will work for two or three weeks in London, first with Selkent which wants to compare it with the articulated Leyland-DAB it has had on loan from SYT, later with Capital Citybus, and one two-door vehicle is being bought for London operation early next year. It will probably be powered by Gardner's 'green' LG1200 engine and will have LT's Schedule X features incorporated into the

design. It will run on all of the company's big bus contracts including, it hopes, some routes into main line stations for which it has submitted tender bids. Unfortunately, with only one bus among many, the public will travel on it by accident and it will be difficult to judge whether it will generate new business.

To the future

As deregulation now looks certain in London, Capital Citybus is keen to grow to run about 250 buses. It also wants to buy a London Buses subsidiary, not necessarily one on its present patch, while the parent company is keen to expand in Europe.

But Capital Citybus does not intend to discard all tradition. 'We don't like the general notion that everything done before is wrong,' says Daniels. Staff are encouraged to be friendly and LT destination displays, with Johnston typography and sometimes eccentric descriptions of terminal points, maintain familiarity. It is that blend of tradition and ambition which the company hopes will ensure it an even more prominent place in the London bus scene of the nineties.



Capital Citybus fleet (May 1992)

Highbridge double-deck

- 1 1960 AEC Routemaster/Park Royal H64R
- 1 1975 Leyland Atlantean/Park Royal H71D
- 1 1980 Leyland Titan/Park Royal H73F
- 14 1981 MCW Metrobus (Rolls-Royce)/MCW H77F
- 1 1980 MCW Metrobus (Gardner)/MCW H72F
- 4 1980 MCW Metrobus (Gardner)/MCW H72D
- 5 1980 MCW Metrobus (Rolls-Royce)/MCW H73D
- 16 1988 MCW Metrobus 2/MCW H73D
- 1 1989 MCW Metrobus 2/MCW H73F
- 4 1987 MCW Metrobus 2/MCW H75F
- 6 1991 Leyland Olympian (Cummins)/Northern Counties H77F
- 1 1989 Leyland Olympian (Cummins)/Northern Counties H75F
- 23 1991 Leyland Olympian (Cummins)/Leyland H76F
- 1 1991 Leyland Olympian (Cummins)/Leyland H76D
- 24 1991 Dennis Dominator (Gardner)/Northern Counties H76D
- 2 1991 Dennis Dominator (Gardner/Cummins)/N Counties H74F

Total: 105

Lowheight double-deck

- 2 1979 MCW Metrobus (Gardner)/Alexander H73F
- 1 1982 MCW Metrobus (Gardner)/Alexander H72F
- 8 1989 Leyland Olympian (Cummins)/Alexander H79F
- 3 1977/78 Bristol VRT3 (Gardner)/ECW H74F
- 2 1978 Bristol VRT3 (Leyland)/ECW H74F
- 6 1975/76 Daimler Fleetline (Gardner)/N Counties H80D

Total: 22

Midibuses

- 20 1992 Mercedes-Benz 811/Reeve Burgess B28F
- 3 1992 Mercedes-Benz 811/Alexander B28F
- 10 1992 Optare Metrorider B28F

Total: 33

Single-deck bus

- 2 1986/87 Scania K92/East Lancs B51F
- 1 1989 Scania K93/Plaxton B51F

Total: 3

Total fleet: 163

Capital Citybus routes

97 Chingford Station-Leyton
 97A Chingford Station-Walthamstow-Whipps Cross
 123 Ilford-Wood Green
 153 Finsbury Park Station-Smithfields
 158 Chingford Mount-Stratford
 165 Rainham-Romford Market
 212 Walthamstow Central-Chingford Station
 215 Walthamstow Central-Yardley Lane Estate-Lea Valley Camp Site
 236 Finsbury Park Station-Hackney Wick
 246 Harold Hill-Corbets Tey/Cranham
 248 Romford-Cranham
 251* Southgate Station-Southend
 252 Chase Cross-Hornchurch
 257 Walthamstow Central-Stratford (starts October 1992)
 298 Southgate Station-South Mimms
 299 Muswell Hill-Cockfosters Station
 321 Rickmansworth Station-Luton (Hertfordshire CC contract)
 323* Rainham-Belhus
 345* Rainham Station-Belhus
 348* Romford-Ockendon-Thurrock Lakeside
 365 Mardyke Estate-Havering Park
 446 Upminster Station-Cranham
 550 Gallows Corner-Cranham
 565* Romford-Elm Park-Thurrock Lakeside
 645* Barking/Romford-various coastal resorts
 D4 Mile End Station-Leamouth Shuttle
 D6 Isle of Dogs-Hackney Central
 W6 Southgate Station-Lower Edmonton Station
 W10 Enfield Town-Crews Hill

* commercial services

Routes 123/65, 246/8/52, 323/45/8/65, 446, 550/65, 645, D6 operated by
Frontrunner Buses (South East), remainder by Walthamstow Citybus.

Bottom:
Following the Mercedes Capital's second batch of midibuses have been
10 Optare Metroriders. 626 (J626 MHM) is seen at Southgate in March.
B. M. GILBERT

Bottom right:
A recent acquisition from Highland Scottish is this Leyland Olympian,
172 (C172 CAS).
MALCOLM KING

Facing page, left:
Seen when new, in original livery, is Metrobus Mark 2 282 (F292 NHJ).
R. J. WATERHOUSE

Facing page, right:
This former Plymouth Leyland Atlantean, GDR 204N, is now a trainer for
Capital Citybus, in a distinctive livery.
JOHN YOUNG



Right:
Mercedes/Reeve Burgess midibuses
617/20 (J617/20 HMF) at the
Smithfield terminus of the 153 in
February.
R. A. SPANO

This picture:
An all-Leyland Olympian, 151
(J151 YRM) on a Docklands Light
Railway replacement service in April.
C. LUBBE



P R E S E R

A YORKSHIRE TRA

ANDREW JAROSZ reports from Halifax and De bus weekend

Just to liven up this year's rally calendar two of Yorkshire's more enthusiastic groups decided to move their events from their traditionally crowded August slots to the May Day Bank Holiday and create a two-day Yorkshire Festival of Transport weekend centred on Halifax and Dewsbury. Understandably this caused some confusion amongst preservationists and enthusiasts alike, who are famed for memorising rally calendars by rote; and although not quite the first events of the season we all knew that launching a major event like the Heart of the Pennines in May was a gamble which could backfire disastrously.

In the event we needn't have worried. Entries were up, visitors were up and the weather — always unpredictable in this part of the world — was glorious, with numerous stallholders developing a pre-season tan which would not have disgraced holidaymakers in Tenerife!

Heart of the Pennines

With visitor estimates ranging from 3,000 to 10,000 for the day the Heart of the Pennines Rally was a fitting tribute to the 25th anniversary of the Mersey & Calder

Bus Preservation Group which organised the event superbly.

Although it has been said many times before it is worth repeating for those not in the know that the Rally is unlike any other in the calendar. The emphasis is on enjoyment, informality and fun. Meticulously restored buses from all over the country arrived in their own time, collected their plaque and either rested to show off the painstaking efforts that had

been made to get them into show condition or embarked immediately on the gruelling hill climbs for which the rally is famed.

No bus was turned away, from 60-year-old veterans to nearly new double-deckers fresh out of revenue-earning service. Of the 80 or so entries many just turned up unannounced on the day. There was no concours, no judging, no token parade around deserted city streets, no 'turn up for a certain time', 'don't leave early' and



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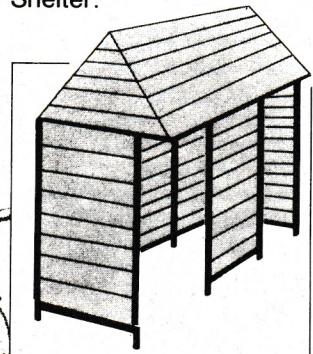
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